



**Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) Meeting
HHSC Virtual Platform
December 9, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

Member Name	Yes	No	Professional Representatives (non-members)
Esmeralda Guajardo, MAHS	✓		
Richard Chamberlain, DrPH, MPH, RS	✓		
Steven M. Kotsatos, RS	✓		
Josh Ramirez, MPA, CPM	✓		
Eduardo Olivarez	✓		
Arturo Rodriguez, DNP, MPA, CPM	✓		
Angela Mora, M.A. Ed.	✓		
Emilie Prot, DO, MPH	✓		
Lillian Ringsdorf, MD, MPH		✓	
Rachel E. Sonne, MD, MPH	✓		
State Representative Bobby Guerra		✓	Represented by Jasmine Owen
Senator Eddie Lucio Jr.		✓	

Attendees Present

Francesca Kupper, Karin Hopkins, John Villarreal, Alberto Perez, Dr. Allison Banicki, Rosy de los Santos, Adriana Corona-Luevanos, David Gruber, Tony Aragón.

Agenda Item I: Call to Order, Welcome, Chair Remarks, Meeting Logistics and TFBHO Roll Call

Chair Guajardo opened the meeting at 1:00 pm. She thanked HHS production staff and welcomed attendees to the Task Force of Border Health Officials (TFBHO) meeting. She asked Ms. Kupper to continue with logistical announcements. Ms. Kupper presented the meeting production staff and reminded members of the meeting/virtual platform guidelines. She proceeded to the roll call and nine members were present to establish a quorum and she turned the meeting over to Chair Guajardo. She continued by asking other attendees to introduce themselves and thanked them for attending. She asked if Senator Lucio, Representative Guerra or their staff were in attendance; none were present.

Agenda Item II: Consideration of October 21, 2021, Meeting Minutes

Chair Guajardo asked members to review the October 21, 2021 Meeting Minutes. She asked for a request for a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes. Mr. Steven Kotstatos provided the first while Mr. Eddie Olivarez seconded the motion. Chair Guajardo



acknowledged the motions and asked Ms. Kupper to initiate a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes. The motion carried and the minutes were approved.

**Agenda Item III: Announcement: New Chair and Vice-chair;
 Discuss next steps**

Chair Guajardo introduced Mr. David Gruber, Associate Commissioner for Regional Health Operations to address TFBHO members regarding the new leadership for the TFBHO. Mr. Gruber expressed his gratitude for the extraordinary efforts members conduct daily in addition to their roles as members, especially during the pandemic. He also acknowledged the product of their work, noting that some recommendations had resulted in changed legislation. He also announced the most recent recommendations report was published to recognize their efforts. He also recognized Chair Guajardo, former Vice-chair Dr. Hector Gonzalez and present Vice-chair Mr. Eduardo Olivarez.

Mr. Gruber also spoke of next steps and discussed a rotation schedule that would give opportunity for all members to lead with experience by having members serve as vice-chair before they lead as chair. He also explained that previous tenure was considered and that the chair and vice-chair wouldn't be from the same county to ensure fairness and border-wide leadership, representation and continuity. The rotation schedule will be as follows:

- 1/1/2022 – 8/31/2023 Hidalgo Chair/Brownsville Vice-chair
- 9/1/2023 – 8/31/2025 Brownsville Chair/El Paso Vice-chair
- 9/1/2025 – 8/31/2027 El Paso Chair/Harlingen Vice-chair
- 9/1/2027 – 8/31/2029 Harlingen Chair/McAllen Vice-chair

He wished all members much success with their roles in the future. He also noted the great work that's done city-to-city and/or county-to-city with binational collaboration with counterparts in Mexico, noting that the such good work is done at the local level. He referenced members participation toward actionable items that either changed legislation of directly or indirectly affect what we now do to improve border public health because of the work done by the TFBHO.

Chair Guajardo asked if newly appointed Chair Olivarez and Vice-chair Rodriguez wanted to say a few words. They both thanked Mr. Gruber, the staff of the Office of Border Public Health for the opportunity to serve in a new capacity and expressed gratitude to Chair Guajardo for her leadership. She also mentioned the early days of working with Senator Lucio's staff and thanked Mr. John Villarreal for his constant support.

Agenda Item IV: Update: COVID-19 Vaccines and boosters

Chair Guajardo welcomed Mr. Tony Aragon, Immunization Unit Director (DSHS), to provide the COVID-19 Vaccine Update. He started by reminding members that at the last meeting the vaccine for the ages of 5-11 was approved on November 3, 2021. He also stated that the one-year anniversary of COVID-19 vaccine availability to all Texans was right around the corner. Since December 14, 2020, the total number of doses administered in Texas



equals to approximately 37 million. This far exceeds the norm of approximately 6-8 million per year. The following details the number of vaccine doses administered in Texas (approximate figures):

- 18 million – one dose (Pfizer/Moderna; approximately 70 percent of all Texas residents)
- 16 million - fully vaccinated (two doses – Pfizer/Moderna or one dose - Johnson & Johnson; approximately 60 percent of all Texas residents)
- 3.4 million – booster dose/third vaccine

Since November 3, 2021, 14 percent of Texas children aged 5-11 have received at least one dose and about 5 percent with two doses. (There are approximately 3 million children in Texas aged 5-11.)

Mr. Aragon continued by answering members' questions about the COVID-19 vaccine being part of the Texas Vaccines for Children (TVFC) Program. Because the COVID-19 vaccines are an independent program that offers free vaccines for everyone, we don't know when the vaccines will be part of the TVFC Program; perhaps after the pandemic.

Mark Ritter, Senior CDC advisor, mentioned that COVID-19 vaccination funding has been approved through June of 2024. The question is, will COVID-19 vaccines become yearly vaccines? When we know the answer to that is when a determination may be reached about it joining the TVFC Program.

Mr. Olivarez thanked Mr. Ritter for his years of service and dedication. Chair Guajardo asked if there is a way to receive actual numbers of vaccinations per county instead of percentages and will it be accessible as apposed to requesting the information when needed? Mr. Aragon stated he'd inquire about that type of information being easily accessible. She also mentioned that while border counties do well regarding vaccinations, many times vaccination rates are above 100 percent due to either census undercounting or people not completing the census. However, vaccination rates may be more telling when compared to census population. Mr. Aragon and Chair Guajardo both agreed that, either way, vaccination rates in border counties are very high and that it's now time to focus on vaccinating children aged 5-11 and boosters for the rest of the population. Even mask-wearing is more prevalent in the Valley as opposed to upstate areas. She thanked him for all of his work.

Dr. Rodriguez asked when statistics will be considered dated (example of someone vaccinated a year ago)? Mr. Aragon admitted that was a difficult question to answer depending on two factors: 1) pandemic end and 2) when the Governor declares that the disaster declaration has been lifted. As of right now, we fall into the statute of anti-viral medication/vaccination as unconsented. When the pandemic is over, vaccines will have to be consented so that vaccinations are included in our registry.

Mr. Olivarez asked about vaccination cards and how difficult it is due to international travel. He also mentioned that he has two employees who are dedicated to entering vaccine information to a portal. He asked if there would be changes in the future. Mr. Aragon stated



that he doesn't expect a change until about a year from now. They're working on developing a newer system that would assist with vaccination records. He also asked about surveillance registry changes. Mr. Aragon stated that they're currently working on privacy issues to improve interoperability of registries and systems.

**Agenda Item V: Presentation: Category 13 of S.B. 1312 (86th Legislature)
Texas Department of Agriculture and internal collaborative
synopsis**

Chair Guajardo welcomed Mr. Cervantes and thanked him and his staff for their work and collaboration with DSHS' Office of Border Public Health. Mr. Cervantes explained the differences between Categories 12 and 13 tests/licenses. The primary difference is that Category 12 includes all types of vectors, including rodents and other mammals whereas Category 13 only deals with mosquitoes as vectors. He also spoke of the legal processes and protocols that occurred to create this specific non-commercial Category 13 test/license for applicators in border counties. Because the Category 13 license is specific to border counties, if someone with such a license moves to a non-border county, they'd have to take the Category 12 test, which is state-wide and not border-specific.

He also explained that training will be offered by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension prior to testing, which is administered by a third-party agency. The testing fees are waived. He also noted a primary difference with this particular test. Most pesticides associated with other licenses are geared toward the chemical application staying in a certain area. However, mosquito applications are meant to extend to as much land area as possible to promote public health by way of mosquito abatement.

These courses and tests are free and amount to about a \$500 savings per license for border health departments and other agencies who require the license along the border. He also asked TFBHO members to assist with the promotion of these courses.

Mr. Olivarez thanked Mr. Cervantes and noted that some jurisdictions or precincts may only send a supervisor to test of the license and have applicators work under his license, which may explain for lower turnouts historically. Dr. Sonne also inquired about the possibility of virtual training and testing done at local health departments as opposed to workers traveling longer distance to test for the license.

Mr. Cervantes thanked Mr. Olivarez and Dr. Sonne for their comments and explained that they also have challenges traveling to different locations throughout the state. He also stated that they're looking forward to on-line options.

Mr. Kotsatos also thanked Mr. Cervantes and mentioned that he sent six staff members from his health department and four out of the six passed the test. Mr. Cervantes gave credit to those who passed as an accomplishment and admitted that it is a difficult test to pass.



Dr. Prot and Mr. Villarreal stated they hadn't seen the course/test schedule and ensured Mr. Cervantes that they would do what they could to share it with appropriate personnel. Mr. Cervantes stated that he would forward the schedule to Mr. Villarreal to share with all members.

Chair Guajardo also mentioned the importance of information sharing to ensure county commissioners are aware of such courses/tests for this license. Mr. Olivarez also stated that 21 of his staff will be attending the course/testing site in Weslaco in March of 2022. Mr. Cervantes thanked him and all members before closing his presentation.

Chair Guajardo thanked him for presenting and looked forward to the positive change in the Valley and the rest of the border. Mr. Villarreal continued the discussion with part B of the agenda item to share the collaboration that had taken place thus far. He detailed the corresponding statute by color-coding it to help refresh everyone's memory of what the statute entailed. He also described the collaborative efforts with the Texas Department of Agriculture, DSHS regional directors, veterinarians and other staff, DSHS' Laboratory and Infections Disease Group, specifically the Zoonosis Control Branch and DSHS' Center for Health and Emergency Preparedness and Response.

Mr. Villarreal informed members of the suggestion to have a speaker from the Western Gulf Center of Excellence for Vector-borne Diseases present at a future meeting to support the next endeavor of producing the Rapid Local and Regional Response and Support Plan. He paused to give members an opportunity to respond. Mr. Kotsatos expressed an interest in having such a speaker present at a future meeting. He also recommended that we do something similar to S.B. 1312 for Registered Sanitarians in terms of having a limited scope license. Mr. Villarreal acknowledged both comments and told members that he'd be happy to schedule speaker for future meeting in 2022.

He also noted that Paul Grunenwald communicated interest in this project as part of his practicum for his doctorate program. He asked members if they'd consider capitalizing on this project to add more substance the Rapid Local and Regional Response and Support Plan. Members agreed and he told them he'd forward the related Excel files as well as the other documents referenced in his presentation.

Chair Guajardo acknowledged members' support, noting Mr. Kotsatos as the lead of the Environmental Health Subcommittee, to take advantage of subject matter experts to accomplish this task as a benefit to the TFBHO. Dr. Prot stated that it was crucial for the Office of Border Public Health to continue to coordinate efforts to comply with this statute involving regional and Central Office staff. Mr. Villarreal agreed and stated that both regional and Central Office staff were well aware that this can't be done solely at the regional level with only three Zoonosis Control staff per region and that he'd continue to pursue the completion of the statute requirement with TFBHO and other staff.

Dr. Sonne also supported what Dr. Prot, Mr. Villarreal and Mr. Kotsatos stated and noted the opportunity to think of primordial and tertiary prevention measures that fall within the registered sanitarian field and primary and secondary measures that fall within the zoonosis



field. She also commented that the population affected falls with the Office of Border Public Health (OBPH), TFBHO members, local health department staff and border health partners. She expressed how crucial it is to give this topic a home since the scope of work seems to have different parts that pertain to different groups. The scope within regions is retail foods, the other side of this scope is with Consumer Protection but they're not in charge of spraying for mosquitoes, etc. She fully supported giving this topic a home since it's particularly important to border public health. She encouraged members to invite not only vector-borne affiliates by zoonosis-related partners with sanitarians and us to produce a recommendation for our report that is actional and still fits within our structure because there's no mechanism to realistically bring it all together.

Chair Guajardo and Dr. Sonne agreed that the OBPH was perfectly positioned to further this vector-centered cause. Mr. Villarreal thanked members for their support and reminded them that there was some momentum garnered for this topic, but many issues came to a halt due to pandemic response. He encouraged all subcommittees to continue communicating and use the OBPH as leverage to support both ends of this topic including the zoonosis and sanitarian sectors. Mr. Kotsatos suggested that we invite speakers from DSHS' Consumer Protection Program and the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation to our next meeting to further this cause.

Dr. Rodriguez also mentioned that the Registered Sanitarians should be involved in the environmental health part of the tire bills that have been previously submitted for legislative change. He stated that the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality should also be involved as well regarding this issue, since it involves illegal storing/dumping of tires that creates an arboviral hazard. We need tools to combat this environmental condition.

Chair Guajardo thanked all members for their comments and moved on to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item VI: Discussion: Bylaws review process

Chair Guajardo asked Mr. Villarreal to discuss the bylaws review process. He explained that it can be a lengthy process and explained the suggested edits were to change the chair and vice-chair and bylaw review timeframes to a fiscal year format from a calendar year format so that it would be consistent with the statute. Therefore, terms would end on August 31st and begin on September 1st as opposed to December 31st and January 1st. Chair Guajardo asked members to reply to Mr. Villarreal about the suggested edits by the following week.

Agenda Item VII: Review Timeline of November 1, 2022 Recommendations Report

Chair Guajardo asked Mr. Villarreal to continue to present by informing members of the timeline milestones in order to produce the November 1, 2022 Recommendations Report on time. Mr. Villarreal mentioned that it was an aggressively scheduled timeline to ensure the report is produced on time. Mr. Olivarez stated that realistically, they only had about six-seven months to complete the report and have it published on time. He encouraged



members to focus on primary areas and expand on previously submitted recommendations. Chair Guajardo thanked Mr. Villarreal for the timeline to give members certain deadlines to stay on task. He also reminded members that an internal report is due on September 1, 2022 detailing actions taken by the TFBHO. He also requested for members to think of meeting dates and alternate meeting dates as they move on to the next agenda item while viewing the timeline.

Agenda Item VIII: Assign 2022 Meeting dates

TFBHO members chose meeting dates and alternate meeting dates for 2022. Mr. Olivarez stated that he'd meet with Dr. Rodriguez, Mr. Villarreal and Ms. Hopkins to ensure meeting dates align with the timeline. He reminded members that subcommittees had to meet simultaneously as well.

Agenda Item IX: Public Comment

Chair Guajardo asked Ms. Kupper if there were any public comments submitted. Ms. Kupper confirmed that no requests for public comments were received. Chair Guajardo continued with closing remarks.

Agenda Item X: Closing remarks, thank you and adjourn

Chair Guajardo noted that this was her last meeting as the chair and thanked all members for their work and success. She expressed that the TFBHO garnered a lot of attention to the border and that's one of the many things that needed to happen. We need for the rest of the state to know that where we live is very different from the rest of the state, especially when it comes to public health. She thanked everyone for being part of the voyage they've been on for the last four years. She thanked Mr. Villarreal, Ms. Kupper, Mr. Chacon, Mr. Gruber and mentioned the work and support of Dr. Gonzalez and his quiet leadership. She thanked all of DSHS and expressed looking forward to not being under so much pressure. She wished Mr. Olivarez and Dr. Rodriguez the best of luck moving forward and offered her support as she passed the torch. She hoped for more in person meetings in the future and adjourned the meeting at 4:05 p.m. Ms. Kupper asked production staff to end the recording.